

CORRECTED VERSION

SAGE-GROUSE LEK TREND DATA BY HARVEST MANAGEMENT ZONE and PROPOSAL FOR A MODIFIED 2014 SAGE-GROUSE HUNTING SEASON IN MONTANA

JULY 10, 2014

Figure 1. Harvest Management Zones 1, 2, and 3 adopted by FW Commission in February 2014. Areas in northwest MT are outside sage-grouse distribution and have been closed to sage grouse hunting.

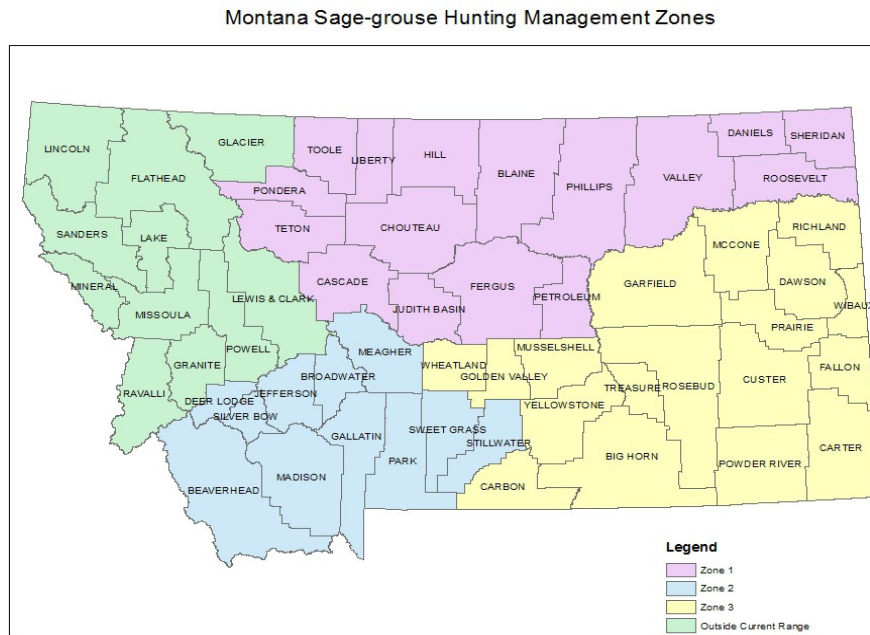


Figure 2. Long-term average (1980 – 2013) for hunting management zone 1 is 28.6 males/lek. 45% of the long-term average is 15.73 males/lek. Counts in 2014 were more than 45% below the long-term average.

Figure 3. Long-term average (1980-2013) for hunting management zone 2 is 24.8 males/lek. 45% below the long-term average is 13.64 males/lek. Counts have not dropped to more than 45% below the long-term average.

Figure 4. Long-term average (1980-2013) for hunting management zone 3 is 29.1 males/lek. 45% below the long-term average is 16 males/lek. Counts in 2012, 2013, and 2014 were more than 45% below the long-term average.

Proposed Sage-grouse Harvest Season for 2014

Season Dates: September 1 – September 30.

Bag Limit: 2 daily. Possession limit is two times the daily bag limit.

Closed Areas: Zone 3 and limited portions of Zones 1 and 2.

Rationale: AHM lek counts are more than 45% below long-term average for three consecutive years in Zone 3. Closure would be consistent with FWP 2005 state plan, implemented by zone. Portions of Zones 1 and 2 proposed for closure because of concerns about sage-grouse persistence in those areas and/or ease of closure description and avoiding hunter shift to areas surrounded by closures. Given the proposed closed area and subsequent hunter shift potential to remaining open areas, the season is also proposed to be shortened to Sept 1 – Sept 30:

PROPOSED CLOSED AREAS

Zone 3: Wheatland, Golden Valley, Carbon, Musselshell, Yellowstone, Garfield, McCone, Prairie, Dawson, Richland, Wibaux, Big Horn, Treasure, Rosebud, Custer, Fallon, Powder River, and Carter counties.

Shields River Valley portion of Zone 2 is an isolated population with few birds. Much of the original sagebrush habitat in the area has been converted to cropland agriculture; thus, the remaining population is threatened by habitat loss and fragmentation. Average count on AHM leks in 2014 was 9 males/lek (n=4). This closure would affect Meagher and Park Counties with the adjacent Gallatin, Sweet Grass and Stillwater Counties also closed to help clarify closure boundaries and to guard against hunter shift to small isolated open areas with low bird numbers.

The portion of Zone 1 north of Highway 2 has few breeding birds. It provides important connectivity and wintering habitat for birds that breed in Montana and Saskatchewan. Depending on weather, sage-grouse that breed in Canada may be in this area during the hunting season. Sage-grouse are considered an endangered species in Canada. This area is also experiencing increased energy development. FWP does not have any AHM leks in this area. This proposed closure in Zone 1 north of Highway 2 includes Daniels and Sheridan counties and northern portions of Toole, Liberty, Hill, Blaine, Phillips, Valley, , and Roosevelt counties.

Glacier, Flathead, Lewis & Clark, Powell, Granite, and Ravalli counties and all counties north and west of these counties are outside sage-grouse distribution and have been and would remain closed to sage grouse hunting.

Trigger for re-opening proposed closed areas: Re-opening criteria includes: 1) lek counts above the 45% closure criteria for three consecutive years; OR 2) a single year with lek counts above the LTA. Either would prompt a re-opening proposal and/or potential season adjustments.

PROPOSED OPEN AREAS

The portion of Zone 1 comprised of Pondera, Teton, Cascade, Judith Basin, Fergus, Petroleum, and Choteau counties and those portions of Toole, Liberty, Hill, Blaine, Philips, Valley, and Roosevelt counties south of Highway 2.

The portion of Zone 2 comprised of Beaverhead, Deer Lodge, Silver Bow, Madison, Jefferson, and Broadwater counties.

Figure 5. Proposed open/closed areas for 2014 sage grouse season. All of Zone 3 is proposed to be closed and the north portion of Zone 1 and east portion of Zone 2 proposed for closure.

